

CORRECTIONS ONTARIO:

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Community Service Orders



Mike J. is learning to care about people and his community through an Ontario program for non-violent offenders. He is repaying his debt to society by working without pay for the benefit of the community.



Ontario

Ministry of
Correctional
Services

Honourable Nicholas G. Leluk
Minister
George R. Podrebarac
Deputy Minister

THE CRIME

Mike J. was sure he could commit a crime and get away with it.

He knew he was smart. He thought his friends were smart.

Mike and his buddies decided to make some easy money by breaking into a few houses.

They talked about details. Which houses to hit. How to fence the stolen goods.

They talked about how much money they'd make. It sounded exciting.

But no one mentioned getting caught.

Like many people who commit crimes, the friends were positive they would 'get away with it.'

They didn't.

THE COURT PROCESS

The friends were arrested as they tried to sell a TV set from one of their break-ins. When they appeared in court on a charge of break, enter and theft, the judge asked a probation and parole officer to complete a pre-sentence report on each young man.

A pre-sentence report is a collection of facts about an offender - the person's family history, including any previous contact with community social agencies, educational and employment record, and medical history. The judge may also request an assessment of the suitability of each offender for a community service order.

The information in a pre-sentence report assists the judge in making decisions.

In Mike's case, this was a first offence. Although he appeared to be the instigator of the crime, his school record was adequate and his employer was willing to keep him on since his work was above average.

The judge cautioned Mike about getting into further trouble. He indicated that he felt Mike was capable of making a concrete and constructive contribution to his community to make amends for his previous behavior.

The judge placed Mike on probation with the condition that, under the terms of a community service order, he complete 155 hours of service without pay over a six-month period.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE OFFENDER

Mike's probation officer arranged through a local agency for Mike to work in a program providing meals-on-wheels to the elderly.

Because Mike's regular job involved shift work, the hours he spent delivering midday meals did not interfere with his paid employment.

The agency and Mike himself both kept records of the hours worked. Mike was expected to show up for work on time and to be reliable and co-operate with regular volunteers.

Any training necessary for completion of a service order is provided by the agency involved.

Failure to complete a community service order assignment is considered a violation of the probation order and means the offender may be returned to court and sentenced to jail.

THE COMMUNITY SERVICE ORDER (CSO)

The order Mike was involved in is one example of the various types of possible service orders which are carried out without pay by the offender, such as shoveling snow or cutting grass for the elderly, or helping the Red Cross or other non-profit agencies. It is a condition of a probation order.

Candidates for the program are carefully screened before a recommendation for a CSO is made to the judge. It is the judge who decides if the individual is suitable for the program and how many hours will be completed.

Once the judge makes his decision, it is the CSO co-ordinator (a probation officer, a correctional services volunteer, or a social worker with a private agency) who assesses the offender's interests and skills and chooses a potential placement.

This might be a home for the elderly or assistance to the elderly through a volunteer group, a hospital, an animal

shelter, work with a children's centre, a YM/WCA, or groups offering clean-up of parks or other public property.

ADVANTAGES OF COMMUNITY SERVICE

Ordering an offender to work without pay for the benefit of the community is one way of seeing that society is paid back for some of the damage caused through crime. A service order like Mike's provides the offender with a chance to participate with non-offenders in volunteer activities for the benefit of the community.

It introduces the idea of regular work habits to those whose wage-earning employment pattern has been sketchy.

A CSO also helps the offender develop skills and abilities, make new friends, and learn how to use leisure time usefully.

The approximate cost to the taxpayer of supervision for an offender on a CSO is an estimated \$3 per day. Imprisonment costs approximately \$50 per day.

BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Service orders save tax dollars in the short run by providing mandatory 'volunteer workers' to the community. Of more importance is the opportunity given to offenders to become useful, law-abiding citizens who choose to contribute to rather than act against society.

In Ontario many CSO participants have continued as regular volunteers after their order was completed. Others have obtained paid employment as a result of job skills learned through the service order placement.